

Hot Shots!

Lured by the promise of 'Robbie Williams', helicopter rides, free drinks and an opportunity to tour a newly built castle, Paul Smith flew across to Holland last month for the grand opening of Shots Media's new HQ...

On the outskirts of a little Dutch town called Beneden Leeuwen is an unusual castle. It has some of the traditional trappings; fluttering banners, towers, big iron gates and a hint of moat. It even has a suit of armour guarding the entrance

But what makes this castle unusual is it's only just been built, and it's the new home of Shots Media. Formerly Shots Video, the adult distributor has rebranded itself to reflect its many facets while moving from its previous home 10 minutes up the road in Druten. The new building is around six times the size of the old one (although it had four external warehouses), with something over 4,000 square metres (40,000ish sq ft) of floor space to play with for warehousing, offices, meeting rooms, a lounge and two very large showrooms. It also have the funkiest toilets I've seen in a long time, with urinals shaped like open female mouths which brought back some good memories. Of visiting bathroom-mania.com, of course.

As the boss's PA Karen gave me the official tour, she pointed out the international sales department, the design studio and urged me to take care on the open wooden stairs which were still awaiting their balustrades. On the ground floor was the cafeteria area, with leather and chrome sofas for hardworking executives to crash on. When Shots moved in, the building was a shell with a roof and windows making it weather-tight, but no interior at all.

It had had to have the offices, showrooms and other spaces built from scratch, from the floor up. Despite officially opening on the 16th of July for a week-long celebration and sale, there was work still going on. Mostly this was restricted to the downstairs offices though; rooms described as being for future expansion. Shots has an eye very much on the future, with the plot of land next door also annexed in case the new building's huge warehouse proves to be too small in future. From Shots Video's humble beginnings at Oscar Heijnen's home in 1997 the business has grown massively, so it isn't bravado that requires room for further expansion to be built in. Having developed from a VHS distie, driving films door-to-door, into publishing, online content and most recently toys 18 months ago, its next



Shot Media's impressive new 'Castle' headquarters...

new frontier is mobile devices.

The castle theme continued in Shots' 'King' Oscar Heijnen's office, high in a corner tower. There's the fireplace from a French castle adding some old world charm to the room. Oscar is a stereotypically affable Dutchman, with English as good as my Dutch is bad. "Did you see the armour as you came in?" he asked me. "It was a present to me from the team here for the new building." Clearly a popular boss, even if he's not so popular at home. "They've not seen me for two months", said Oscar, nodding to photographs of his young family. The big move had required sacrifices to Oscar's life/work balance; "My children need their father to play with, and my wife needs sex," he confided.

When I asked what Shots turnover was, he was a little more coy, but was happy to say he believed they were in the top five adult distributors in Europe. I asked why the Shots name wasn't better known in the UK. "For the British market we do things a bit differently than in other parts of

Europe. It's the same for Hungary, where there's a language barrier and we don't know the people. There are cultural, payment and legal differences that make it better to deal with that territory through local distributors. In the UK you have the beautiful BBFC and their rules which makes doing business there harder. A Max Hardcore film might be with them six months for review and cuts to be made. So we have a very good relationship with ABS, Scala and Net1on1, focusing on products they do best. For DVDs I can say we're the professionals. We're releasing 100 new titles every six weeks. That's a lot! For toys, we're learning the market so maybe we're amateurs still, but we're buying or manufacturing the right products for the right price. So in a year or less, I think we'll be able to say we're professionals for toys also."

I wondered how many toy lines Shots carry and 35-year-old Oscar told me, "I've lost count! We've just added the Nass range, and that's over 1000 articles alone, that we stock.

Pink is also big - female-friendly - and our own range of Shots toys. We're learning what sells well to retailers, but also what sells for them, as they're restocking."

Oscar introduced me to his Number Two, Pierre Barendregt, who looks after sales in Germany, Italy and Spain before delivering me into the safe hands of his Number Three, his brother Dennis. Another laidback Dutchman with an easy manner and wide smile, Dennis showed me some of its latest acquisitions, Nass and girlie, unthreatening Pink toys, as well as its own branded ranges, a dozen different Spanish Fly variants and even dental dams. A fucking machine in the corner was demo'd for me and Prince Dennis, as I was now thinking of him, explained how a deal to show its content on Mobile TV through KPN in the Netherlands had been signed, and that IPTV was being watched very closely.

We climbed a wide staircase up to the showroom of around two hundred studios' DVDs, including Vivid, Robert Hill (eight new titles per month, inc

300-transsexual gangbangs, etc), Extreme Associates, Max Hardcore and the company's own brands. There are negotiations to expand the range carried still further with some big names to help fend off the threat of a shrinking DVD market across Europe. Online distribution licensing is a growth area for Shots and that, along with the introduction of toys, is also helping protect the business from the downturn in hard media sales. "We've been very busy in the showrooms", Dennis told me, "putting carpet down, bringing the stands in, putting stock out, as well as getting ready for the party..."

RED CARPET

To coincide with the grand opening of its distribution centre and corporate headquarters, on July the 18th Shots threw its third Shots Media (previously Video) Party just outside Weurt, about 20Km from the new HQ. Complicating things a bit the 91st Nijmegen March, a four-day-long walking event with over 35,000 participants, was passing the site. The previous year's march had to be abandoned because of the heat. Several participants died, and there were some fears of a repeat as it was around 26 degrees by noon. Directed off the N322, discreet Shots signs made following the detour away from the closed roads easy though and I found the right place not long after the party had started.

Red carpet and security awaited me once I'd squeezed into a parking spot. I arrived just before Wendy Somer, a famous Dutch porn star, and some girlfriends drew up in a black stretch limo and so I got to knock elbows with some other invited paparazzi on my first ever red carpet photo call. I'll bring one of those little stepladders next time.

With lots of heinies of both types about (Heineken and buttocks, if you're not familiar with the word), the party was soon bouncing to music and the singing of a Barry-from-Eastenders look-alike. Inside the marquee canapés circulated against the flow of people, and the free bar did a roaring trade. I'm sorry if I'm painting an idyllic picture, but it was a good do and credit where credit's due. You can say what you like about the Dutch (ie they're obsessed by cheese and ham toasties) but they know how to throw a right royal party.

Lisa Patterson and Kevin Moody of Phoenix Films both looked well and Kev gave me a few words while Lisa did her Tommy Cooper impression - but without the falling over at the end. At least not by the time I left. "We're doing good business with the Combat Zone titles - we've got 30 of their films out now. They're our best selling line at the moment. We've also taken on 3rd World Media, who do a great transsexual line and Japanese titles. We're still selling all

the fat, midget, strange genre stuff."

A little later, fresh from his helicopter jaunt with Lisa, he said, "Oscar's such a good host. The flight was lovely. Brilliant! Shots Media are fantastic, and we wish him luck in the new building..." Here we were interrupted by the arrival of a Robbie Williams look-alike, who belted out the hits. He had all of Robbie's stage moves, and some of his stage presence, as well as the cheeky chappy appeal but without the 'please love me' vulnerability of the original. Still, as a chubby version of 'the fat dancer from Take That', he did well, and I was entertained when he asked if he could.

ABS's Tim Hemming was preparing for the following weekend's ETO Show, but had taken time out of his busy schedule to see Oscar and Shots new warehouse: "We're going to the open day tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing it and doing some reciprocal business. We've got some new products to launch at the NEC (ETO Show) - I'll talk to you about them there - and keep on top of everything. Obviously it's a bit quiet at the moment. It's summer season, holidays are here, but we're getting ready for September and the winter ramp-up. No new acquisitions on the shop front but we're plugging holes in the ones that are underperforming at the moment, and treating the summer as a period of consolidation. Once everything's running as efficiently and effectively as possible we'll look around again. At the moment, if I were looking at another shop, it'd have to be the right deal for us."

Other partying people I recognised included Wim Bos of Mr.B and Sean Sullivan from RMD, who told me he always reads ETO in the loo. "We're here because we do a lot with Oscar and it was an easy decision to get over for a couple of days and have a drink or two. So just a social visit, but it's been a better trip than last year's, when we missed our flight and had to tear over to London City airport from Stansted, go into Amsterdam, train to Utrecht, bus to... by the time we got here it was four o'clock and we didn't have long before having to turn around and go back again. This time we've made a three day trip of it."

Lynton of Robert Hill Releasing Co. was over from California for the party, and was impressed I knew all about Ruby, the transsexual midget; a Robert Hill film. He's thinking of moving into the UK market if his specialist products will get past the BBFC without too many cuts. Keep you eyes open for their red-boxed product.

With helicopter rides over the walking route throughout the day, I was lucky to get a last-minute seat and was taken up with a porn star whose name I didn't catch over the sound of the rotor blades. I'd love to shoehorn a chopper joke in here, but



Oscar Heijnen: "We're buying or manufacturing the right products for the right price"

I just can't think of one. Feel free to add your own if you like. We were taken for a quick spin around the area before swooping back down to the field behind the marquee. As we climbed out, Bos, Shots Media's head designer who's been with the business over four years and co-designed the new building with Oscar, was taking photos of us.

As I left early for a 600Km European Road Trip drive home, a porn shoot was taking place in the stretch limo parked next to the road.

The chauffeur was hovering to deflect any curious passers by. The windows were blacked out, but it wouldn't take a genius to notice the occasional rocking and the Shots Media banners to put two and two together.

Shots Media might not be a porn empire yet, but it's certainly half way there - let's say a kingdom- and despite being based in a modern castle, the firm's forward looking attitude is no fairytale. More success can't be Far Far Away. Thank you, and good knight.



Robbie Not-Williams - The star of the party...